

LAL DED- A GREAT MYSTIC POET

Kashmir has been the testing ground of three universal religions of the world- Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The traits of all these religions have fused into the attitude of a Kashmiri like milk and candy, and it is no surprise that though bearing Hindu or Muslim or even Buddhist names, a Kashmiri even today in actual practice is a living embodiment of Buddhist compassion, Hindu tolerance and Muslim zest for life. Therefore with such a catholic background, secularism to a Kashmiri is not a political expedient but an article of faith ingrained in his blood from hoary times to the present day. 'Kalhana' in his monumental History of Kashmir "River of Kings" has not mentioned even one. Communal trouble between the Buddhist and the Hindus when a voracious race was in progress between their respective adherents to make their own tenets popular and thus steel march over their faiths. In contrast to this, Buddhist Kings have donated large sums for the erection of Hindu temples and shrines & vice versa. Religious battles have always been fought here on paper, in a more rational way or through dialogues which never left bad taste in the mouths. During the Islamic period sultan Zain-ul-ab-Din Budshah in an admirable way and forsooth like a Kashmiri to his marrow renovated demolished Hindu places of worship and even started 'Langaras' at places of pilgrimages for feeding the hungry and the devout.

Kashmir proved very fertile for spiritual people and Sufism flourished here because of the peace loving population and favorable environment of the valley. That's why it is called "REASH WAAR". Kashmir has produced many saints, poets and mystics. Among them, Lal Ded is very prominent. In Kashmir, some consider her a holly woman and some consider her a Sufi, a yogi, or a devotee of Shiva. Some even consider her an avatar. But every Kashmiri considers her a wise woman. Every Kashmiri has some sayings of Lalla on the tip of his tongue. The Kashmiri language is full of her sayings.

It is beyond any shadow of doubt and an established fact that Lal Ded was a mystic of lofty status who had attained the knowledge of God to the degree that Sheikh-ul-Aalam Noor-ud-din Wali (R.A) a brilliant star on the mystic firmament, had to pay her homage with these verses:

"Lal Ded who hailed from Pampore
Finally rested at divine station
Where man becomes immortal.
She united herself with God.
"O" May Lord! Bestow on me, too,
Such a reward"

Every nation supports its identity and status with some artist or poet. The English identifies itself with Shakespeare, the German with Goethe, the Bengali with Tagore, the Iranian with sa'adi, the Punjabis with Waris shah, while the Kashmiris with Sheikh-ul-Aalam and Lal Ded.

When we go through the poetry of Lal Ded, we discover her peeping into those extents where the apparent eyes have no access.

Lal Ded is a beacon which blazed the path of spirituality. Her vakhyas (poetic verses) left an imprint on the minds of Kashmiri people.

We do not know much about Lal's life. Even we do not know her real name. There are only presumptions and people have made just guesses about it. Some have named her 'Padmavati' while some called her 'lalashvary' and 'Lala Yogashvary'. But none has substantiated his claim commonly known by the name of Lal Ded and this has remained a household name in Kashmir (both in Muslims and Hindus alike) for last more than six centuries.

It is an established fact that she was being called 'Lal' before turning ascetic, For instance, she had complained about her in-laws during her house keeping days.

"They may kill a sheep or any ruminant mammal. Lal continue to live with a stone-pestle (round shaped stone)"

In fact, Lal is a symbol of love in Kashmir. This term is cohered to a person who is loved, for instance, even today people in Kashmir give appellation to their father as 'Lala'. This title has a special significance for woman folk, too. We usually call woman by the cohered title of 'Lala'. For example: Salim Lala, Total ala, Shamim Lala etc.

The term 'Lal' involves a pun. One 'Lal' means a pearl and another meaning is pupil of eye (favorites order). Hindus usually connect this title to the names of their dear ones or favorites. For example: Moti Lal, Heera Lal etc.

Probably, Lal Ded would have been called as 'Lal' (the pearl) in her very childhood in an act of caress.

The birth date and place of Lal Ded is also controversial. Some believe that she was born at 'Pron Dhastarn' (which means old city). Present 'Pandrathan' is the distorted name of 'Pro Dastarn'. The majority of researchers are of the opinion that her birth place is the 'Sampora' (the village adjacent to Pampore). In earlier days 'Pampore' was called 'Padmaan Pora' and with the passage of time it distorted and concluded at 'Pampore'. The king 'Utat Ped's' minister naming 'Padma' had colonized this village in the year 812-49 A.D. Regarding the birth date of Lal Ded some say she was born in the middle of 14th Century, while some describe her birth date between 1317-20. Renowned historian 'Hassan' has quoted her date of birth as 1300 A.D. It is commonly believed that she passed away at the age of seventy or eighty years.

The History compiled by 'Kalhana' titled as 'Raj Tarangini' is consisted of events up to 1149-50 A.D. While 'Jon Raj' inserted the events up to 1457 A.D. in his history. But strangely there is no mention of Lal Ded in the book. Although 'Jon Raj' has quoted Sheikh Noor-Ud-Din (R.A) in the accounts. It is also revealed that during the regime of Sultan Ali Shah (1413-19 A.D.) restrictions were imposed on Hazrat Sheikh Noor-Ud-Din (R.A), commonly known as Sheikh-ul-Aalam.

Nevertheless, some historians relate an incident mentioned by Jon Raj (which the latter has written in his book) to Lal Ded. According to this event, one day the son of Sultan-Alau-Ud-Din naming prince Shab-Ud-Din went for hunting to a jungle along with his three companions. These companions were Malik Jandra, Aadrish Rawal and Ikhtaji. There in the jungle they saw three ascetics who mysteriously appeared before them. The chief of these ascetics recognized the prince. She offered a glass of juice to him. He drank a little of it and then passed it on to Aadrish Rawal. The Latter also gulped down a little from the glass and then gave it to Malik Jandra, who quaffed

all the juice. He left nothing for Ikhtaji. It is said that on observing all this, the chief ascetic predicted that prince would become king and a famous conqueror; Aadrish shall be his Prime Minister and Malik Jandra the commander-in-Chief but Ikhtaji shall collapse before reaching his home. It is said that the events occurred exactly according to this prediction.

Jon Raj has not named the ascetic but some historians relate this event to Lal Ded and believe that the chief ascetic was Lal Ded.

Lal Ded's close contemporaries such as Jon Raj, Shri Dhar and others have not quoted Lal Ded anywhere. Even this name is nowhere seen in 'Tawarikh-I-Rashidi', 'Biharistan-I-Shahi' or 'Tarikh-e-Kashmir'. It is Baba Dawood who has for the first time referred to Lal Ded in his book entitled 'Asrar-ul-Abbar'. Actually this is the book which reveals the roaming of Lal Ded in nudity. 'Asrar-ul-Abbar' tells us that during the regime of Sultan Shab-us-Din (1344-45 A.D), Lal Ded deserted her home.

It's believed that the accounts of Lal's life are camouflaged. Mostly legends are attributed to her. According to these legends Lal Ded was born in Sampora village, in a Kashmiri Pandit Family and afterwards she was married in a nearby village of Pampore. Her mother-in-law teased and harassed her in different ways. Besides, she would provoke her husband against 'Lal'. 'Lal' would do very hard mystic exercises on the advices of her guru (spiritual guide). Finally one day she deserted her home and began to move nude. Many miracles are referred to her.

The *vaakhs* uttered by the saint poet in the fourteenth century, haven't surprisingly lost any of their freshness and charm of the Kashmiris today; they have perpetuated Lalla's memory, as a living monument of her literary achievement and of the heights she had scaled as a mystic. They range from the mature aphorism of a seer, an accomplished mystic, to the spontaneous outpourings of the seeker (in the realm of the divine love): she speaks in the tone of a wise sage in one *vaakh* here, counseling self-restraint and avoidance of extremes, and conveys her anguished sense of separation from the beloved in another *vaakh* there; many *vaakhs* have the preacher's tone and a good number of them breathe the confidence of a highly developed yogini who has tasted the final beatitude at now holds infinity in the palm of end. In view of these qualities, Lal Ded's verse sayings can aptly be characterized as the poetry of direct mystical experience.

Though a literary study of Lal ded has to base itself mainly on the solid foundation of her *vaakhs*, any adequate account of this great saint-poet cannot leave out the biographical aspect altogether. In her case, however, we have no authentic biographical details available and have nothing other than the *vaakhs* to fall back upon to draw useful inferences from. Several Lal Ded scholars, notably Jayalal Kaul, have raised the question of the authenticity of the *vaakhs* – Kaul would depend upon the stylistic criteria in establishing the genuineness or otherwise of a Lalla *vaakh* and, at the same time, he accepts as valid the fact of linguistic change some of the *vaakhs* could inevitably have undergone across time.

Grierson and Barnett have done a commendable job in bringing out *lalla-vaakyaani*, which remains to this day the most valuable and dependable collection of Lalla's *vaakhs*. Some scholars want to project Lal ded mainly as a Saivite, a follower of the Trika (Kashmir Saivism);¹ others paint her as deeply influenced by Islam, particularly Sufism, while still others would characterize her teachings as an "admixture of the non-dualistic philosophy of Saivism and Islamic Sufism".² One cannot deny the fact that much of the mystical terminology we come across in the *vaakhs* is very obviously rooted in Kashmir Saivism; such terminology is clearly traceable to her upbringing in a Kashmiri Hindu family. Some scholars, attaching significance to the interaction between Hinduism and Islam in Lalla's time, have been at pains to assert that her *vaakhs* have a marked bias of both Saivism and Sufism, or more precisely, owe their richness and power to the fusion of Yoga and *Irfan* that the saint-poet realized in her spiritual life. In the view of a scholar, "Lalleshwari took the best of Islamic thought, and fused it with the best in her own creed."³

To see Lal Ded as just the follower of a particular religion or of a particular school of thought would only dwarf her spiritual stature, which is indeed among the loftiest in the recorded history of the saints and mystics of all time. When we study the *vaakhs* as a body of utterances and ponder over them seriously, we feel convinced of her uniqueness and of her extraordinary stature. Whatever she might have owed to this or that influence is far outweighed by her individual genius. Her perceptions are entirely her own, her experiences very acute and her poetic sensibility one of the finest we have known. All these qualities are immediately discerned by the perceptive reader. Men of all faiths will always derive satisfaction from Lalla's *vaakhs*; all will agree that her teaching approves of all faiths, rather than conflicts with this or that creed. This is because she has got to the root of the matter and realized the universal in its essence. Behind all religions, there is one Religion which belongs to all humanity — of which the *rinda* the unfettered mystic is the most legitimate custodian. Lal Ded, undoubtedly, speaks to us, in the *vaakhs*, in the confident tone of such a mystic.

SOME SELECTED VAAKHS OF LAL DED WITH ANALYSIS

If we accept the fact that Lalla was a highly advanced mystic who saw the Self all around her as the Reality behind phenomena, then to expect her to have scrupulously followed social conventions or the dictates of religious order is to shut our eyes to the greatness she had achieved. True mystics tend to escape "theaters of organized religion."⁴ Lalla's *vaakhs* bear ample testimony to her mystic vision and to her state of spiritual exaltation. In them, we find "live symbols of a deeply felt experience",⁵ which explain Lalla's extraordinary power and appeal as a mystic poet. It is to the *vaakhs* that we must now turn our attention, to the poetry of aspiration and fulfillment that they embody.

Lalla's *vaakhs* are an assemblage of her utterances handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth, not recorded in any authentic manuscripts during her life or preserved in writing posthumously. The order in which they occur in this or that compilation today has no validity beyond what suited the considered choice of the editors. It is not to be disputed that, if we arrange the *vaakhs* in accordance with a preconceived scheme, we can demonstrate a pattern in Lalla's spiritual development — a thing rigorously done in *Professor Parimoo's Ascent of the Self*. In the work, the *vaakhs* have been arranged systematically to show Lalla's progress in the Mystic Way: the stages she passed through as a yogini till she attained union with the universal Self. One could, however, have reservations about such an approach, though its usefulness cannot, at the same time, be disputed (as Professor Parimoo's lucid and pains-taking study bears out). It is very difficult to judge the actual state of mind of a mystical poet, precisely the level of his or her spiritual attainment, on the basis of isolated sayings or poetic compositions; no definitive arguments and interpretations can be offered in support of the views one puts forth in this regard. Secondly, we should not forget that the moods of a mystic are likely to vary from time to time, assuming that he feels impelled to communicate his experiences as a normal human being. So long as poetic communication belongs to the realm of art, it seems reasonable to expect the mystic poet to sing of pain and separation and of joy and fulfillment, in the same breath at times, and in quick succession, too, all depending upon the social context of such communication. The accomplished mystic may, for example, look back and write faithfully of his former moments of poignant divine separation in moving lines. In the absence of any knowledge of the time-sequence of poetic utterances or compositions, the task of tracing the mental or spiritual development of a poet through sheer literary analysis seems a very difficult one, and the conclusions arrived at thus cannot be altogether unquestionable.

Lal Ded Says,
 The Guru gave me but one precept:
 "From without turn inward"
 It came to me (Lalla) as God's word;
 I started roaming nude.

This vaakh is very significant in that Lalla unfolds here a remarkable experience she had as she progressed in her spiritual quest. She indirectly acknowledges her indebtedness to her preceptor here, identifies as siddha Srikanth (Sedamol) by her biographers, who is believed to have been an advanced yogi of the Trika School. Lal Ded was a spiritual genius, who can be classed with the greatest mystics of the world. Yet, before she came out into the open and roamed about as a rinda, not tied to any dogma or religious order, she sought initiation from a Master in accordance with the tradition followed by seekers throughout all cultures. Having all the makings of a yogini (before she got initiated), Lalla took the Guru's precept as God's word; it worked an instant transformation in her. She was thrown into a state of ecstasy, often a sign of the seeker's intimacy with the Divine. In that state, she continued to move about god-like, forgetful of her physical condition and of how others regarded her in that condition.⁶

The vaakh conveys in brief the steps of the sadhana prescribed by Lalla's Guru – withdrawing the mind from the external world and directing its inward, on the self. The Trika School, no doubt, preaches this doctrine; but we find it as no different from the essential teaching of the Upanishads. In fact, it is the gist of what mysticism, as a conveyed to "Illumination".

The maximum portion of Lal' poetry revolves around her lamenation. Again in this verse she laments:

'By way I come, but I went not by the way,
 While I was yet in the midst of the embankment with its crazy bridges,
 The day failed for me,
 I looked within my poke, and not a cowry came to hand (or, alt, was there)
 What shall I give for the ferry-fee?'

Translated by G. Grieson

This world is titled as a 'world of cause and effect. Here, we find a cause for everything that is either made or damaged. While a man steps in this world, he obviously comes through a passage of 'cause'. Man and women couples; sperm goes into the womb of female; a fetus takes a shape and after fitting into a scheme, a child steps into this world from from the womb of mother. Naturally, we are aware of that 'passage' through which we undertake the 'journey' and arrive in this world. The 'passage' means the system of that process, which a child passes through. So, we know the cause of our emergence.

The formation of our physique in context of the Quran is:

Verily we created
 Man from a drop
 Of mingled sperm
 And Allah says:
 Man we did create
 From a quintessence (of clay)
 Then we placed him
 As (a drop of) sperm'
 In a place of rest
 Firmly fixed
 Then we made the sperm
 Into a clot of congealed blood;
 From that clot we made
 A (fetus) lump; then we
 Made out of that lump
 Bones and clothes the bones
 With flesh; then we developed out of it another
 Creature,
 Blessed by ALLAH
 The best to create.⁷
 And Allah says:
 Has there not been
 Over man a long period
 Of time, when he was
 Nothing (not even) mentioned?
 Verily we created
 Man from a drop
 Of mingled sperm
 In order to try him
 So we gave him (the gifts)
 Of hearing and sight.⁸

Lal Ded in the forgoing verse reveals that while I came to this world through a passage which is not unknown but while I had to return there, it was not similar passage. She means when I stepped into this world, my soul was embarked on the conveyance of the elemental body. But while, my soul left for the abode (probably she means the spiritual journey), my conveyance of the elemental body became useless. This is the passage that cannot be comprehended. Virtually that cannot be called a passage too, as it is not even a passage.

It will be worthwhile to mention that when a mystic attains this stage he discovers himself liberated from the clutches of time and space. Many mystics while arriving at this stage have revealed that they neither stay nor travel.

[All my day passed at that embankment]

Here, symbolic language has been used. Day has been used for life span and embankment for the world. She wants to say that I was bestowed on the life span for doing virtuous deeds but it all squandered without achieving considerable gain. This wealth of time squandered to little purpose. Now while I have to cross the 'puli sirath' (only approach to paradise, an extremely narrow bridge). I have no currency of deeds to pay as the hiring charge for the boat of salvation. In this context, I am totally in solvent. Therefore, Lal Ded says:

[I am empty handed, so I have nothing to pay for the hiring of boat]

Lalla expresses her aspiration for the divine through the metaphor of one's being ferried across the 'ocean of samsara'. Through its use in several of her vaakhs, which are often recited and slung to musical accompaniment in Kashmir, the metaphor has assumed the character of a loaded symbol – a highly suggestive image that continues to impress the popular imagination. The vaakhs given below employs this image in a crucial context, conveying a spiritual losing of great intensity.

I am towing my boat on the sea
With a slender thread;
Would that God heard my prayer
And ferried me across!
Like water vanishing
In Plates of unbanked clay,
All my striving is proving futile;
How I pine to get back home!

In the above verse, Lalded says that water is leaking from my unbaked pots. That means, through the 'pots' of 'days & nights' her water (life) is leaking (the vicissitudes are consuming her time), while I yearn for hereafter so that my meeting with my beloved matures & my craving, yearning and wait comes to an end and I reach my goal.

In this superb poetic marvel and a very popular poetic composition Lal Ded employs on image of the self as a boat tossed about on the ocean of life. She uses the image of a river boat being towed by men or horses on a tow-path. Thus she gives a wonderful description of her journey through life. She has made two appropriate comparisons. One with a boat sailing through turbulent waters being towed probably by men or on a tow path by a frail untwisted cotton thread and the other unbanked earthen dishes filled with water ready to fall apart. The former indicates to the uncertainty of this life constantly living in the fear of death and the later indicating the truth of life which slowly wastes away that entire one has earned, easily mixing with material nature rather than being above it or in control of it. Man has no control over these circumstances. He is compelled to live under severe pressure of the scare of death and disease, the essential factors of this life. There is no ultimate remedy to this except being one with the Lord which Lal Ded calls her real home. So with the same hope she pleads with God to take her across the sea of existence of her real home the home hereafter.

The metaphor used here is very appropriate. There is a permanent danger to this boat sailing through the turbulent waters of life to get detached from the path of salvation and get lost. The pulls and pressures of worldly attachments are very hard. There is always danger of going astray from the reality. The only way of this transitory life is to understand its truth and work for ultimate deliverance.

The above verse under discussion is an expression of Lal Ded's almost humility and lowliness. While a mystic performs strenuous exercise and devoted much attention to worship, a stage comes when he/she realizes that his/her has exercise and worship are mere a weak thread. He or she feels that to rely on such stock for salvation is in vain. The dependence upon deeds, mystic exercises and prayers is abandoned. He/she discovers His/her own being lowest and inferior. He/she gets the revelation that it is only God's Grace and Mercy which works for salvation. This realization fills the mind of the mystic with humility and dedication. He/she realizes the power and Greatness of God. This actually is the very realization of God and recognition of one's own self. This is the stage where servility attains loftiness and the status of the most eminent of created beings is bestowed on a person. Thus, the mystic prays with extreme humility. For Mystics 'home' means hereafter. Because their only aim is union with God and it matures only after death. Their adobe happens in paradise and the master of this house is God.

Lal Ded has used the best possible metaphors to explain her subtle view about his transitory life and keeping under control the desire of the world. One who's successful in understanding its truth and works for his liberation in the teeth of all stress and strain of worldly temptations is the true warrior quite unlike one who wins a worldly battle and is crowned a winner. As a colander cannot hold water for even a moment so the worldly name and the fame does not last as everyone has to face death however famous or immensely rich he be. All worldly great, kings and warriors, authors and politicians, rich and wise live their limited life and pass on leaving the imprint of their deeds and good and bad for a while for the people to remember till it too vanishes away with the passing time. Now there are people who are able to take the boat of their life across this murky ocean amid the fiercest storm of the worldly desire as an efficient boatman rows across successfully the troubled waters without giving his men even the feeling of the fierce wind as if holding the storm in his fist. The action is also compared to a trainer who controls a wild elephant with a trail rope like a single strand of hair which is impossible. One who follows the real purpose of life and gets awakened to its truth.

The attachment of the worldly affairs is a strange phenomenon. In spite of being fully aware about its frailty all worldly wise go on living life vigorously as if it has to last forever, as if there is no danger of disease and deprivation, loss and need and the worst of all the abominable worldly death. The lure of the world and the attached pleasures of sense coil him in such a web of ignorance that all indications of the impermanence of this life fall flat on him till the end comes and he is taken to an unknown destination never to return. He is forced to leave back everything, power and pelf, money and riches, family and children and go alone at the mercy of the Lord which is the ultimate truth. And the story does not end there. He is accounted for his deeds, good and bad and sent for another term of life according to the merits of his karma.

By the highway I came,
But by the highway I return not
And so I find me still on the embarkment,
not having gone even half the way,

And the day is done the light has failed,
I search my pockets but not a cowrie find:
What shall I pay for the ferry fee?

5. of Jaya Lal Kouli

Just as in any field of study without putting effort one cannot expect to get results. Vivekananda says it took him a life time of practice to gain the little he learnt. The problems to separate the real from the unreal, who we truly are from what we are not keeping the inner peace and equanimity all the time. The consciousness has as if got mixed what one is not.

Lalla defines the life of an ordinary man ironically attributing it to her personality to act worthwhile for her awakening of self saying that she came into this world through the right path i.e. with a definite mission of attaining personal awakening and divine consciousness but unfortunately she didn't follow the right path and involved herself as usual in the false worldly affairs so in the middle of her journey of life the day waned and she lost her way. Now on getting awakened to the real purpose of her life she in order to get across the ocean of existence began looking for some money in her pocket to pay for the ferry but not finding even a single penny worthy to be paid to the ferry-man she is extremely disappointed as it was not the ordinary money that would help. She actually needed some money earned upon some worthwhile activity in the divine path that would ferry her across and having none she had to get stranded sorrowfully. Here the oft used proposition 'to get across the ocean of existence' is worth attention. It does not indicate to the normal end of life but a successful life-term when the essential purpose of this transitory existence is fulfilled. This is the much sought after desire of a devotee to get awakened to the truth of the Lord in one life only to be ultimately one with Him. This can in other words be called the success of one's life term quite different from the ordinary death of an ordinary person. The figure of the ferryman suggests the myth of the soul's perilous journey across the river Vaitarni after death. Hindu mythology equipped the soul with a coin for the ferryman, to ease the discomforts of transit but the coin which Lalla tries to search out is something different. It is the coin earned in life doing fair deeds for the benefit of man and other creation of the Lord.

The human life is a rare opportunity provided to him after changing numerous body forms only with the purpose that he may rise to the occasion and work for realization of self, but unfortunately man gets intoxicated heavily again and again with the affairs of the world such that he forgets its real purpose and gets involved further in evil karmas such that its real purpose and gets involved further in evil karmas such that the web of his transitory lives goes on widening and the chance of getting liberated weaker. Though there is no dearth of divine indications that warn about the instability of this life but the glamour of the world is so captivating that almost all follow the world vigorously thus distancing from grace of the Lord day after till the end is reached.

Ah me! the Five, the ten
And the Eleventh, their Lord the mind,
scrapped this pot and went away.
Had all together pulled on the rope,
Why should the Eleventh has lost the cow?
Why should soul have gone astray.

6. of Jaya Lal Kouli

Lal Ded is showing us how to control the mind. If one for the Lord by all the senses and all their activities as well toward the Lord automatically giving the Lord control over the mind.

Lalla reasons out the damage caused by fiery human instincts and senses in achieving the goals in personal awakening. Five human instincts -- anger, envy, greed, attachment and ego, five senses --- seeing, hearing, smelling, taste and touch along with the organs of sense are the main hurdles in the path of spiritual development. These instincts especially helped by five sense organs controlled by mind as their master are individually responsible for keeping away man from the real path of existence. The animal instincts keep him busy in body pleasures and the collection of material benefits. Five sense organs keep him busy involved in the pleasures of the world and keep him glued to the world. The great advanced souls have all these senses and instincts in control and it is because of this capacity that they enjoy the grace of the Lord. One should try to imagine the condition of a person who is not at all slay to any of his instincts. He has full control on anger, greed and above all ego. He naturally gets detached from the lure of the world. There are some great souls who have their five senses too in control. They cannot differentiate between tastes, for them sweet and sour is the same; they do not get attracted to any kind of human beauty as their eyes are indifferent to any kind of beauty except the beauty of their Lord. Lalleshwari says these powerful human attributes pull on the thought in different directions thus stopping all opportunities of thinking worthwhile.

“No luminance can equal the love of God;
No sacred pilgrimage spot can equal the place
Where one is able to converse with Him;
No acquaintance or affiliate can equal His Grace
And no delight can equal His Dread”

The truest devotion of the Lord is such a bright light which shows ways to all the hidden aspects of the realization of self and the grace of the Lord. In order to achieve such selfless devotion one has to forget all personal interests and give the love of God the highest priorities. Once heart is filled with the true devotion of Lord the mind becomes a storehouse of love for all living and non-living without any discrimination. The deeper the love of Lord the sooner the goals are achieved. There are people who are soaked permanently in the love of their Lord so much so that their mind cannot accommodate anything except it and the Lord is always with them at their disposal ready to serve them. Lalleshwari says further that no pilgrimage is as sacred as the place where a sincere devotee of the Lord converses with Him in his ecstasy of devotion. Truly all places are created by the creator as the best spots for finding Him. There is no place exclusive except one where a devotee is sitting in deep meditation and absorbed in His deep thought and this is really the best pilgrimage spot for him. To such a devotee of the Lord His presence is felt everywhere and all places become the pilgrimage spots where he can converse with Him. Thus the devotion of the Lord proves to be his choicest friend and associate capable to be his best benefactor and pathfinder in all adversities. Now the fear of God becomes his best guide and associate as in His presence nothing is likely to go amiss and everything is sure to be performed according to the best moral standards. One who is the best friend of God is naturally possessor of highest moral character because he feels the presence of his Lord everywhere while doing everything. How can he afford to commit wrong in the presence of the Lord! As such

nothing wrong is done and the fear of the Lord becomes his best companion. Thus Laleshuri says that the highest pleasure in the world is the fear of the Lord which keeps him always on the right path. So she counsels always to be in the dread of the Lord which proves to be the highest delight unequalled by any worldly pleasures.

The burning problem of the present world is the presence of hatred between groups and individuals, nations and communities which generates terror and war. The true love of God generates true love between His people which is the end of all strife. How and when this object can be achieved is a big question.

What is bitter at first is sweet in the end,
What is sweet at first is poison in the end

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Lalla pinpoints a remarkable fact of life. She says whatever tastes bitter in life is actually sweet and what tastes sweet is in fact the bitter poison. All the glamour of the world seems sweet and enjoyable but in fact it is not so because it results into attachment to this transitory life which is destined to end miserably. The lure of this life is so hard that almost everybody falls straight into its trap never to get freed. This is the strange but bitter fact of life that we go on ignoring its essential purpose and never fulfill its real purpose. The path to awakening seems difficult hence bitter but there is nobody denying that it's the truest reality of life that takes us across this murky sea of existence and proves very sweet ultimately. Human being is considered far exalted and exclusive among all the creation of the Lord for the special capacities provided to him. And the purpose of this specialty is not as ordinary as we take it by involving ourselves cleverly in the worldly affair. It is an open fact that this life is a rare opportunity provided to man to experience and choose a path for himself -- either the bitterness of renouncing the comforts of worldly life today for a better tomorrow or the preference for a sweet worldly life of today for a dark future. Laleshwari says that those who with full determination engage themselves tooth and nail for the achievement of the actual purpose would definitely reach the city of their choice i.e. the abode of the lord. The futile worldly comforts bind us all with the world and dissuade us from the real purpose. Great souls ignore all pleasures and comforts of the world in order to get closer to the Lord. The ordinary people go on wasting this rare opportunity unendingly provided to them for a special purpose by enjoying the futile glamour of the world which proves ultimately a bitter poison for them when they face the pain of death.

“To everyone is given the choice.
It all depends on the effort put in,
And the unflagging determined will,
For whoever strives must n arrive
At the city of his choice”.

- The Gita, VIII, 37-38

A wooden bow & rush grass for an arrow:
A carpenter unskilled and a palace to build;
A shop unlocked in a busy bazaar.
A body uncleansed by waters holy –
Oh dear! Who knows what hath befallen me?

4. of Jayalal Koul

Laleshwari describes probably the early stages of her personal development or just tries to awaken a spiritual aspirant in an ironical note to the hard realities of godliness. In a wonderful poetic composition she weaves some symbols, the one comparing her personal self to a wooden bow with an arrow made with a frail thin piece of straw quite incapable to shoot for any purpose indicating her utter incapacity, lack of strength and courage for any higher purpose. And then an unskilled carpenter entrusted with the job of constructing a grand palace! The palace suggests king's abode but here the king is her Lord seated graciously in her honoured self but the palace is not befitting his grace, not a magnificent one because the carpenter is not competent. Laleshwari considers herself incompetent to attain realization of self as efficiently as is required, so an unskilled carpenter entrusted to build a palace. Again a shopkeeper in a busy market having left his store unlocked and attending some other ordinary job! Once more a person preparing to engage in some celestial vocation without having his body purified through a dip in any holy waters! Thus it seems quite unthinkable to her how she would achieve her distant goals. The description of such incapability may be to allude to the frustrations which a divine seeker faces usually in the beginning. It's normal that a beginner in any great job faces hardship and gets scared looking at the gigantic job he has undertaken but with time and some initial strides forward he is encouraged and gradually the fear is subsided. The purpose here is not to frighten the divine seeker but awaken him to the imminent dangers that he's liable to face. Unless he's made aware of the cautions that he has to exercise he's liable to commit mistakes that may ditch him lowest of the low from any stage of his development. The attractions of the world are too captivating to resist and on the other hand the human existence too weak to defend. So the purpose here is to make him aware about his limitations. How beautifully Laleshwari has done this job is highly commendable! The comparisons are so live and captivating that one is wonderstruck at her artistic abilities. The human being is a soldier at war with a wooden bow and an arrow made of straw, how he is expected to fight! He's entrusted with making a palace like building but he's quite unskilled a carpenter! Again he's a keeper with his store full of wares in a busy market but he's away on some other ordinary job! Though Laleshwari was born a fully awakened person capable to achieve any of the highest goals but she had again to toil hard to achieve her ultimate purpose. Her efforts bore sufficient fruit and she was freed from all worldly worries though her holy life proved a long saga of suffering, trials and tribulations obviously a big symbol for all divine seekers.

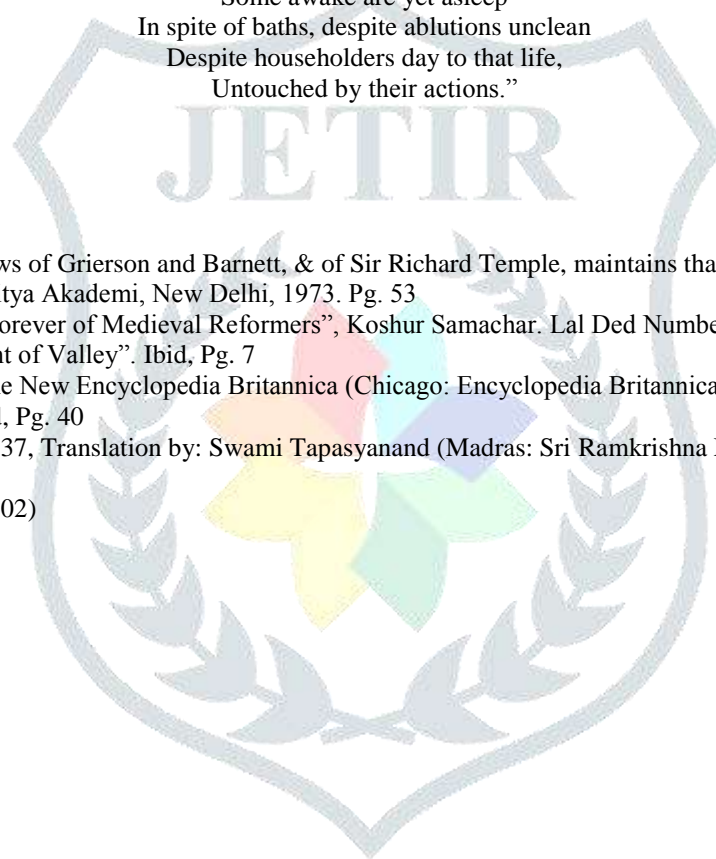
“Lord seated inside
I seek Him in the external world;
I sought Him outside
Though my Lord was already seated inside my heart.
On this realization I felt joyful and contented.
Upon meditating deeper I felt His non-dual holy presence everywhere
And myself becoming one with Him”

Translated by Sham. S. Misri

The ordinary seeker of the Lord visits numerous holy spots and pilgrimages with lot of devotion and love but is unable to fulfill his soul's desire all his life. He spends lot of money giving away to saints and faqirs and even the needy in the hope of pleasing the Lord but again he feels hopeless though he achieves some of his heart's solace having done something good. But for the devout seeker the presence of the Lord is felt everywhere including his own self. Once his mind gets somewhat detached from the desire of the world and its attractions and keeps under curb his animal passions, emotions and other demands of the body he begins to feel the presence of the Lord inside the deepest recesses of his heart and even the minutest nerves of his body seem to vibrate with the holy presence. It's such a feeling of joy and satisfaction which is far above all the happiness of the world. Once experienced the seeker rejects naturally all the joys of worldly wealth, possessions and prosperity as these are all of temporary nature liable to end soon. Laleshwari says she sought her Lord here and there but found Him ultimately seated within her own self. The secret was further revealed to her upon her profound meditation and systematic exercise of breath when each of her body nerve responded to her positively and she took steps in knowing gradually about the truest secrets of the Lord and His whole creation. It was a wonderful achievement for her as with every passing breath awakening came revealing step by step till she became one with her Lord and nothing remained unachieved for her. It was truly a wonderful development as an ordinary drop of water had become the ocean itself, or an ordinary soul had become part of the Universal soul, the Supreme-Shiva. The essential fact established here is the truth about the Lord being the non-dual indisputable Lord of the universe having all attributes within and for all purpose the creator, preserver and destroyer with all other numerous awakened souls inseparably merged with Him. Laleshwari was a highly awakened soul who had achieved all the heights of spiritual advancement and had come to life with a special mission of awakening the masses to the truest purpose of this life and being one with Supreme Lord.

“Some though asleep are yet awake
Some awake are yet asleep
In spite of baths, despite ablutions unclean
Despite householders day to that life,
Untouched by their actions.”

Translated Sham. S. Misra



- ¹ Jayalal Koul, Endorsing the views of Grierson and Barnett, & of Sir Richard Temple, maintains that “Lal Ded was Saivi Yogini of Kashmir School”. Lal Ded, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1973. Pg. 53
- ² P.N.K Bamzai.”Laleshwari – Forever of Medieval Reformers”, Koshur Samachar. Lal Ded Number (1971), Pg. 16
- ³ Daya Kishan Kachru. “The Light of Valley”. Ibid, Pg. 7
- ⁴ S.K. Ghose. “Mysticism” In The New Encyclopedia Britannica (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1977) Pg. 786
- ⁵ Quoted in Jayalal Kaul, Lal Ded, Pg. 40
- ⁶ Srimad Bhagvata, Sloka 36 and 37, Translation by: Swami Tapasyanand (Madras: Sri Ramkrishna Muth, 1982) Vol. IV, Skandhas X-XII, Pg. 70
- ⁷ Al Quran, Surah-Al-Alaq (96:1-02)
- ⁸ Al-Quran: Surat-Al-Kahaf